

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 SSM-03 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 IO-13 OMB-01 DHA-02
EB-08 EUR-12 /102 W
-----130815Z 050436 /14

R 130714Z APR 77

FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4396

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BAGHDAD 0614

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT IZ

SUBJECT: SADDAM HUSSEIN INTERVIEW--USINT COMMENT

REF: BAGHDAD 0605

1. SUMMARY: IN INTERVIEW FOR U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT
IRAQI LEADER SEEKS TO COMMUNICATE WITH AMERICAN PEOPLE
AND USG, WARNING THAT WE ARE SUSPECT FOR OUR SUPPORT
OF ISRAEL, OUR PAST SUPPORT OF KURDISH NATIONALISTS AND
PENDING BOYCOTT LEGISLATION. HIS UNRELENTING HOSTILITY
TOWARD SYRIAN REGIME CONTRASTS WITH CONCILIATORY WORDS
FOR SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT AND IRAN. HE KEEPS FULL RANGE
OF OPTIONS OPEN FOR OPPOSING MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT.
END SUMMARY.

2. FACT THAT INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE MAY BE EVEN MORE
SIGNIFICANT THAN SUBSTANCE OF HUSSEIN'S REPLIES. WITH
SOME THREE HUNDRED FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN TOWN TO COVER
BAATH PARTY'S THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY, SADDAM HUSSEIN
REWARDED AN AMERICAN NEWSMAN WITH ONLY INTERVIEW HE HAS
GRANTED TO PRESS SINCE AL-MUSSAWAR INTERVIEW OF TWO
MONTHS AGO. MINISTRY OF INFORMATION OFFICIALS
WERE STUNNED THAT HUSSEIN CHOSE TO SPEND OVER TWO
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HOURS TALKING TO AN AMERICAN ON APRIL 7, THE DAY OF THE
ANNIVERSARY OF THE PARTY, WHEN MAJOR PUBLIC EVENTS
WERE UNDERWAY. APPARENT REASON WAS IRAQI REGIME'S
SEVERE DISAPPOINTMENT AT PITIFUL RESPONSE TO ITS
PREPARATIONS FOR A TRIUMPHANT INTERNATIONAL GALA OF
ARAB AND LEFTISTPOLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS (DESCRIBED
SEPTEL). HUSSEIN MAY WELL HAVE REALIZED THAT IRAQ WAS

STILL ISOLATED FROM MAJOR FORCES IN THE WORLD.
VIEWED IN THIS LIGHT, INTERVIEW WAS EFFORT TO EXPAND
IRAQI CONTACTS BEYOND COMMUNIST NATIONS, IDEOLOGICAL
EXTREMISTS AND SEEKERS AFTER IRAQI HANDOUTS.

3. KURDS: ISSUE OF PAST USG SUPPORT FOR KURDISH
NATIONALISTS AND SUSPICION ABOUT OUR PRESENT ATTITUDE
CLEARLY REMAINS A MAJOR TROUBLE SPOT BETWEEN IRAQ AND
U.S. BEFORE SEEING HUSSEIN, U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT
CORRESPONDENT MULLIN HAD THREE HOURS OF OFF THE RECORD
TALKS WITH MINISTER OF INFORMATION TARIQ AZIZ. AZIZ,
A MODERATE BY BAGHDAD STANDARDS, EXPRESSED SUSPICION
THAT CIA WAS STILL INTERESTED IN FOMENTING KURDISH
DISSIDENCE AND WAS HELPING SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE EFFORTS
TOWARD THAT END. WHILE SADDAM HUSSEIN EXPRESSED
OUTWARD CONFIDENCE THAT KURDISH PROBLEM WAS BEING SOLVED
AND RESERVED JUDGMENT ON U.S. ROLE, HE ALSO MADE
STATEMENT THAT "U.S. IS ALWAYS IN FAVOR OF RAISING
PROBLEMS FOR IRAQ". WE SHOULD HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT
DANGER THAT KURDISH ISSUE STILL POSES TO U.S. INTERESTS
IN IRAQ.

4. RELATIONS WITH U.S.: HUSSEIN MADE USUAL LINK TO THE
NEED FOR CHANGE IN USG MIDDLE EAST POLICY. WE ARE
INTRIGUED WITH INDICATION THAT HE HAS NOT DISMISSED
OUT OF HAND STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY ON
ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT. THIS IS CONTRARY TO ASSERTIONS
OF REGIME-CONTROLLED MEDIA THAT U.S. POLICY HAS NOT
AND WILL NOT CHANGE. HUSSEIN TOOK SIMILAR RESERVED
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POSITION ON ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENTS.
QUESTION IN HIS MIND IS WHETHER IT IS PRIMARILY A
TACTIC AGAINST OUR FOES OR WHETHER WE WILL APPLY HUMAN
RIGHTS PRINCIPLES DOWN THE LINE. UNSPOKEN, BUT CERTAINLY
ON HUSSEIN'S MIND, IS QUESTION OF ISRAELI OCCUPATION
POLICY AND PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. MULLIN CHOSE NOT TO
INCLUDE AN ACID REMARK BY HUSSEIN ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN
LEBANON, PROBABLY A REFERENCE TO ALLEGED USG COLLUSION
WITH SYRIAN SUPPRESSION OF PALESTINIANS AND LEFTISTS.

5. U.S. BUSINESS: WHILE EXPRESSING INTEREST IN CONTINUING
OUR COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, HUSSEIN CONFIRMS INDICAT-
TIONS THAT WE HAVE FROM WORKING LEVEL THAT IRAQ IS NOT GOING
TO ACCOMMODATE ITSELF TO PENDING ANTI-BOYCOTT LEGISLATION.
BY VIEWING PASSAGE OF SUCH LEGISLATION AS EVIDENCE OF
U.S.-ISRAELI INTERDEPENDENCE, HUSSEIN WOULD MAKE IT
ANOTHER TEST OF WHETHER OVERALL U.S. POLICY TOWARD ARABS
HAS CHANGED FOR THE BETTER.

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6. RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORS: UNRELENTING HOSTILITY TOWARD SYRIA WAS PROBABLY TO BE EXPECTED ON ANNIVERSARY WHICH MAGNIFIED BAATH PARTY INTERNAL DISPUTES. HUSSEIN EXPRESSES DETERMINATION, WHICH WE BELIEVE IS GENUINE, TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH IRAN, A POLICY WHICH HAS CLEARLY SERVED INTERESTS OF BOTH PARTIES. HE CAREFULLY LIMITED HIS CRITICISM OF SAUDI OIL POLICY, BUT HE LEFT NO DOUBT THAT IRAQ IS PREPARED TO RAISE ITS PRICES IN JULY IF NO ACCOMMODATION IS REACHED ON OPEC PRICING POLICY. HIS ANSWER ON KUWAIT MAINTAINS IRAQI INTEREST IN TERRITORIAL ADJUSTMENTS WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING KUWAITI INTERESTS AND SOVEREIGNTY.

7. SOVIET-IRAQI RELATIONS: HUSSEIN STRESSED IRAQ'S COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE DESPITE IT APPRECIATION FOR SOVIET MILITARY AND OTHER ASSISTANCE. HE STATES WILLINGNESS TO SEEK ARMS FROM OTHER SOURCES, AND HE OPPOSES FOREIGN BASES IN THE AREA. GENERAL THRUST OF HIS REMARKS IS THAT SOVIETS HAVE OBLIGATIONS TO SUPPORT ARAB CAUSES, NOT VICE VERSA.

8. ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE SETTLEMENT: PERHAPS THE MOST AMBIGUOUS PORTION OF THE INTERVIEW. MULLIN THOUGHT THAT HUSSEIN HAD ORIGINALLY SAID THAT IRAQ "WILL OPPOSE
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ANY AGREEMENT WE DON'T BELIEVE IN THROUGH ALL AVAILABLE
POLITICAL MEANS." MULLIN HAD PROBED FOR CLARIFICATION
OF WHETHER GOI WOULD BACK REJECTIONIST FRONT TERRORISM
AIMED AT DISRUPTING SETTLEMENT EFFORTS AND FELT THAT
HUSSEIN HAD RULED OUT SUCH MEANS. HOWEVER, HUSSEIN
WAS SPEAKING IN ARABIC, WHICH MULLIN DOES NOT UNDERSTAND.
INFORMATION MINISTER, WHO WAS PRESENT AND WHO PERSONALLY
REVIEWED TEXT WITH HELP OF TAPE RECORDINGS, CONCLUDED
THAT HUSSEIN HAD NOT MEANT TO PUBLICLY FORECLOSE ANY
OPTIONS. MULLIN ALSO INTERVIEWED FATAH REJECTIONIST
ABU NIDAL, WHO IS BASED IN BAGHDAD. ABU NIDAL STATED
UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT HIS MEN WOULD USE ALL MEANS AT THEIR
DISPOSAL TO PREVENT A SETTLEMENT. MULLIN BELIEVES
THAT GOI HAS NOT YET ACCEPTED THIS APPROACH BUT
IS NOT PREPARED TO RULE IT OUT EITHER. IT IS CLEAR, IN
AN CASE, THAT HUSSEIN DOES NOT EXPECT ANY SETTLEMENT
STEMMING FROM CURRENT EFFORTS TO BE MORE THAN BRIEF
RESPIRE IN ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.
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